

DECEMBER 2025

AN OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE WORKS INC.

December In Review

Jalen Prater

December marked our final chance to get fruit trees and vines in the ground, and we used it well—planting muscadine grapes, crab apples, fig trees, and azaleas before the season closed. As planting wrapped up, we reflected on the impact made across Memphis in 2025. This year, Memphis Native Tree Works established 15 new orchards, planting 97 fruit trees, 22 nut trees, and 41 bushes, brambles, and vines.

MARY AND ENOCH PLANTING
MUSCADINE GRAPE



These orchards are expected to produce 12,016 pounds of food annually (about 36,047 servings) and more than 861,000 servings over their lifetime, including native blueberries, persimmons, pawpaws, pecans, and apples.

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Northside Square: Reimagining a Landmark

by Author

Northside Square is the adaptive reuse of the former Northside High School, a long-vacant 270,000-square-foot building in the Klondike neighborhood of North Memphis. The site is being transformed into a shared community campus that brings together organizations focused on workforce training, healthcare access, literacy and education, fitness, and visual and performing arts. The project also introduces new affordable rental housing, helping create stability while expanding access to services that have historically been limited in the surrounding area. By intentionally partnering with mission-aligned tenants, Northside Square is designed to support long-term opportunity and neighborhood connection. The public ribbon cutting will take place on January 16 at 10:30 a.m., and will mark a new chapter for both the building and the community.



NORTHSIDE SQUARE DEVELOPMENT



INTERNS INSTALLING ORCHARD AT FRAYSER NURSERY

Growing the Next Generation of Environmental Stewards

by Author

We'd like to extend a sincere thank you to Tiana and Olivia from the University of Memphis for choosing to spend their internship with us at the native plant nursery. Internships like these create meaningful connections between academic programs and community-based work, allowing students to apply what they're learning in the classroom to real, on-the-ground conservation efforts. The University of Memphis's environmental programs play an important role in training the next generation of land stewards, and partnerships like this help ensure that knowledge translates into tangible impact across the Mid-South. Having completed one of my own college internships at Turkey Creek native nursery with Birmingham Southern, I can personally attest that the skills gained—from plant identification and propagation to ecological planning and land management—stay with you long after the internship ends. There has rarely been a more important time to learn these skills, as we work to protect biodiversity, restore native habitats, and build resilient ecosystems throughout the region. We're grateful for the care, curiosity, and dedication Tiana and her colleague brought to the nursery, and we're excited to see how they carry this experience forward as they continue their studies and future careers.



FORAGED NATIVE SEED COLLECTION

Seed Saving & Foraging: Preparing for the Next Growing Season

by Author

Winter is seed-saving season, when fruits, flowers, and seed heads release the genetic blueprint for the next generation of plants. From dried flower heads to ripened fruit, nature has countless ways of protecting and dispersing seed, waiting for the right conditions to grow again. Foraging for seeds is a meaningful way to participate in this cycle, but it requires care, patience, and a little research. Identifying species correctly helps prevent the accidental spread of invasive plants and ensures you're supporting native ecosystems. Many Tennessee natives also require cold stratification, meaning they need exposure to winter temperatures before they'll germinate. Understanding soil preferences, expected germination rates, and watering needs will greatly improve your success when planting in spring. Some of our favorite seeds to collect this year were sumac, indigo, pawpaw, and sunflower. Pawpaw seeds, in particular, require special attention. Seeds should be harvested from fully ripe fruit, gently cleaned of pulp, and kept moist—pawpaw seeds should never be allowed to dry out. They benefit from several months of cold, moist stratification and typically germinate slowly, sometimes taking weeks or months to emerge.

When foraging in Tennessee, collect only small amounts from healthy, well-established plants, avoid protected lands unless permitted, and always leave plenty behind for wildlife. Label and store seeds in a cool, dry place (or moist for species like pawpaw), and keep notes on collection locations. Thoughtful seed saving helps preserve biodiversity and ensures local plant genetics continue to thrive for generations to come.

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Volunteer Impact Report

This year, 386 volunteers contributed a total of 1,613 hours of service to support our nursery operations, representing an estimated \$56,128 in volunteer value. This incredible level of support has helped us pot, plant, maintain inventory, and keep our nursery moving through a busy growing season.

We're especially grateful to Volunteer Odyssey for their continued partnership and dedication to connecting engaged community members with meaningful, hands-on work. Their support has been instrumental in providing the time, care, and attention our nursery depends on to thrive.

At this time, we don't have any volunteer opportunities scheduled, but we look forward to sharing new opportunities in our January edition.

Thank you to everyone who showed up, got their hands dirty, and helped us grow—your impact continues to take root across Memphis.

VOLUNTEER SIGN UP SCAN BELOW



“We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.” — Winston Churchill



VOLUNTEERS AT KNIGHT ARNOLD

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